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Netrunner Derezzed on the Gatling Engine

by Jens Kreutzer
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What happened on 1 September 2004 was a hard blow indeed for the **Netrunner** community: Together with some other games, **Netrunner** was removed from the list of playable games on the GatlingEngine. Even the **Netrunner** message board was simply not there anymore, derezzed overnight. This is terrible news for every **Netrunner** enthusiast who has played a game online and witnessed the beautiful representation of the cards, the counters and other game information. But it must be devastating for Eric Platel, who was the project leader and had made a huge effort to make the **Netrunner** conversion a reality.

What had happened? As Bug Laden, the mastermind behind the GatlingEngine, explained soon afterwards, he had received word from the law department of Wizards of the Coast: "The Wizards/Avalon Hill games are being taken down by compliance to a Cease & Desist order issue by Wizards of the Coast attorneys. As you might know, Wizards, Avalon Hill, and Hasbro are all the same companies. The removal of Yu-Gi-Oh is a preventative measure. Even though the game is offered for free, we received no formal permission from Upper Deck." Next to **Netrunner**, this list included:

ARC Systems by Wizards of the Coast
Battletech by Wizards of the Coast
Earthquake by Wizards of the Coast
Harry Potter by Wizards of the Coast
Portal by Wizards of the Coast
Stratego Legends by Avalon Hill
Titan: The Arena by Avalon Hill
Yu-Gi-Oh by Upper Deck

It is not totally unexpected that Wizards finally objected to the use of their property by the public—from the company's point of view, this is completely understandable. On the positive side, it means that Bug Laden's web project has become so successful that Wizards have noticed it, but that is some small consolation of course. It seems that we are back to the much more low-profile NetNetrunner and IRC (Internet Relay Chat). It is rather disappointing that the next World Domination tournament cannot happen on the GatlingEngine now, because everyone seemed to be pretty much fed up with IRC.

Eric, though your project was cut short by the powers that be, I'd like to thank you once more for what you have done for the **Netrunner** community. At times, **Netrunner** was one of the most popular games on a list that included dozens of others. We even did some demos for new players (who liked the game in most cases), which is a rare thing indeed these days. I'd also like to thank everybody else who helped support Eric in his efforts; this includes a lot of people who scanned card images and made them available. Thank you, guys—we had a great time.

The German Netrunner Nationals

by Lukas Kautzsch
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edited by Jens Kreutzer

On 11-12 September 2004, Karlsruhe City Grid hosted the German **Netrunner** Nationals 2004. There were twelve participants in total, eleven in the Sealed Deck/Draft tournament on Saturday and six in the Highlander Constructed tournament on Sunday. We played a Draft format with one double starter, one limited booster, one normal and one rareless *Proteus* booster and one *Classic* booster per player. Eleven people showed up and played four rounds (Swiss system). Five players selected the "Weefle" option, playing Sealed instead of Draft.

Day 1: Sealed Deck/Draft tournament

1.	Fabian Fritzer	6.5 GP		66-27 AP
2.	Roland Schediwy	6.0 GP		63-29 AP
3.	Dieter Geulen* (S)	5.3 GP		57-45 AP
4.	Sven Helmer	4.5 GP	21.0 OGP	51-39 AP
5.	Olaf Wolf	4.5 GP	17.2 OGP	49-45 AP
6.	Lukas Kautzsch	4.0 GP	18.8 OGP	44-43 AP
7.	Wolf-Christian Gantert (S)	4.0 GP	15.8 OGP	46-53 AP
8.	Günther Bogdan (S)	3.5 GP		43-49 AP
9.	Martin Müller*	2.7 GP		47-61 AP
10.	Christian Schmidt* (S)	1.3 GP		35-71 AP
11.	Askia Stieglitz* (S)	0.0 GP		16-80 AP

* = includes one bye; (S) = chose to play Sealed instead of Draft.

Day 2 saw a Highlander Constructed tournament. Only five people managed to play in both tournaments, but a newcomer swelled our ranks on Sunday, enabling us to avoid any byes.

Day 2: Highlander Constructed tournament

1.	Fabian Fritzer	5 GP	63-33 AP
2.	Roland Schediwy	5 GP	52-52 AP
3.	Olaf Wolf	4 GP	50-44 AP
4.	Lukas Kautzsch	4 GP	45-59 AP
5.	Jens Kreutzer	3 GP	49-58 AP
6.	Wolf-Christian Gantert	3 GP	40-53 AP

Combined Ranking (Day 1 + Day 2)

1.	Fabian Fritzer	11.5 GP	129-60 AP
2.	Roland Schediwy	11.0 GP	115-81 AP
3.	Olaf Wolf	8.5 GP	99-89 AP
4.	Lukas Kautzsch	8.0 GP	89-102 AP
5.	Wolf-Christian Gantert	7.0 GP	86-106 AP
6.	Dieter Geulen	5.3 GP	57-45 AP
7.	Sven Helmer	4.5 GP	51-39 AP
8.	Günther Bogdan	3.5 GP	43-49 AP
9.	Jens Kreutzer	3.0 GP	49-58 AP
10.	Martin Müller	2.7 GP	47-61 AP
11.	Christian Schmidt	1.3 GP	35-71 AP
12.	Askia Stieglitz	0.0 GP	16-80 AP

So Fabian Fritzer is the old and new German national champion—for the third time after 2001 and 2003. Congratulations!

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#19: Golden Loop

by Jens Kreutzer
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"More of a sidenote than a realistic plan."
—Byron "Neal" Massey on Golden Loop.

In my very first **Netrunner** starter, I got an Executive Extraction. Ever since, the prospect of reducing agenda difficulty with Executive Extraction and its complements Genetics-Visionary Acquisition and Artificial Security Directors has tickled my imagination, since it makes installing and scoring agendas in one turn a possibility. The effects are cumulative, so that after scoring three Executive Extractions, for example, Gray-Ops agendas with a printed difficulty of 3 can be scored "for free", though you still need to take an action for installing them.

Many other people have been fascinated by this trio of cards, too. Perhaps the most obvious thing to do with it is to pick one of the three, plus another 3-difficulty agenda to go along with it, ideally one with some more agenda points on it to prevent the Corp deck from overflowing with agenda cards. The reason for picking a 3-difficulty agenda is of course the fact that you are able to score it in one turn after only one of the difficulty-reducing agendas has been scored.

Let's take a look at likely candidates:

Genetics-Visionary Acquisition (GVA)
reduces the difficulty of Research agendas. We have the following in the difficulty-3 range: Artificial Security Directors and Superserum, which isn't such a broad selection. Perhaps if the Corp has a big problem with viri, it could pack six Superserum and six GVA. But that doesn't sound like a strong strategy because Superserum doesn't actively help the Corp along the path to victory.

Executive Extraction (EXX)
makes scoring Gray Ops agendas easier. There is GVA to start with, but also Hostile Takeover, Unlisted Research Lab, Corporate Downsizing and Security Purge. Here, there are some pretty solid agendas, and a good Gray-Ops deck with EXX is definitely doable. Hostile Takeover yields a lot of bits, but you would need 18 agenda cards if you combine it with just EXX. Unlisted Research Lab and Corporate Downsizing are very useful in themselves and are great candidates for combination. Security Purge is a whole strategy in itself and also very promising.

Artificial Security Directors (ASD)
helps with scoring Black Ops agendas. Next to EXX, there are Project Babylon and Corporate War. While Babylon might be nice for the surprise value, Corporate War is really the benchmark card with its 3 agenda points. ASD/Corp War is doubtlessly the strongest combo of all in this context, and you can read all about it in another installment of this column. Suffice it to say that you can get away with using as few as 10 or 8 agenda cards in your Corp deck (4 or 5 Corp War plus 6 or 3 ASD) and scoring just three agendas for the win.

While combining two of the trio might be feasible, that which suggests itself right away is the combination of all three agendas (six of each makes 18 agenda cards/points in the deck):

6 Genetics-Visionary Acquisition
6 Executive Extraction
6 Artificial Security Directors

This strategy is called "Golden Loop", "Golden 18" or "Golden Triangle". I wonder why nobody picked up on the devilish "666" reference yet, but perhaps we can take it as a hint at the fact that it is fiendishly difficult to collect six each of these much-coveted rares. In the remainder of this article, I'd like to take a closer look at Golden Loop, starting with its history. Gray-Ops decks with Executive Extraction will probably feature in another installment of this column.

The "Golden Loop" strategy was first mentioned on the Netrunner-L as early as 17 May, 1996, by Steve Kertes, who didn't give any deck list, but commented that it "would work out nicer if you were playing to a score higher than 7". People realized right from the start that the "Golden Loop" approach was big fun, but not that competitive: "[B]efore you get too thrilled and use this combo in every deck – [consider that] if you had scored two Corp Downsizing and a Corp War (all [with] three difficulty), you would have won the game, which is the real goal." Steve Bauer really hit the nail on the head here (25 June, 1996).

Richard Cripe got a little bit more specific when he wrote about his idea of fleshing out the core concept on 2 October, 1996: He suggested an iceless deck, with lots of Tag'n'Bag cards and Systematic Layoffs for fast-advancing the first agenda. His verdict was: "It's a fun deck, but has obvious flaws."

We got a complete decklist at last on 7 March, 1997, when Jennifer Clarke Wilkes published her "Wheels Within Wheels" article on the Netrunner-L. That article was written for (and later published in) the *Duelist* magazine, but Jennifer tried to get some feedback from list members first, which was happily given by Ed Chen, Wyatt Cheng, Michael Keane, Byron Massey, David Orr, Skipper Pickle, and others.

Golden Loop Deck from *The Duelist*

6 Genetics-Visionary Acquisition
6 Executive Extraction
6 Artificial Security Directors
6 Chicago Branch
4 Systematic Layoffs
5 Accounts Receivable
3 BBS Whispering Campaign
3 Haunting Inquisition
3 Rock Is Strong
3 Colonel Failure

Note that this version does not include any tagging or bagging. In the end, the decklist still needed some improvement, as was pointed out by Ben Matthews: The ice is much too expensive and too far in-between to be a reliable protection, and so the Chicago Branches don't make much sense, as they must survive a turn untrashed in order to be effective. Systematic Layoffs is really the fast-advance card of choice and should be used exclusively. Here is my suggestion for a decklist that remedies these problems:

Improved Golden Loop Deck

- **6 Genetics-Visionary Acquisition**
- **6 Executive Extraction**
- **6 Artificial Security Directors**
- **7 Systematic Layoffs**
- **8 Accounts Receivable**
- **3 BBS Whispering Campaign**
- **3 Haunting Inquisition**
- **3 Glacier**
- **3 Banpei**

This deck tries to gain some bits with Accounts Receivables and perhaps install a piece of ice on the Central Data Forts, then goes on to fast-advancing the first agenda in turn 2 or 3. If all goes well and the matching cost-reduced agenda shows up, the second agenda can already be scored without the help of Systematic Layoffs.

Glacier is great once the first agenda point is scored, since it can protect either HQ or R&D, taking into account the Runner's approach and the current area of heaviest agenda-clogging. Later, one surplus piece of ice can protect a subfort for BBS Whispering Campaign. It's a pity that scoring that many agendas doesn't gain any bits for the Corp, but on the positive side, scoring them will get cheaper by the minute, from 2 to 1 to 0 bits.

Of course, scoring seven or even more (thanks to Glacier!) agendas takes its time, and nine pieces of ice aren't very many. A dedicated Runner will mercilessly attack HQ and, above all, R&D. Especially dangerous will be Runners who use virus and ice-destruction strategies. It is mostly the inexperienced player who will be surprised by the uncanny synergy of Golden Loop and perhaps be at a loss about what to do. All in all, it is not recommended to try this deck in a competitive tournament situation – hence Byron's evaluation that I quoted at the beginning of this article.

A variant of Golden Loop could follow the ideas of Richard Cripe and Richard James Salts, who mused about including either tag'n'bag elements or Net-damage nodes in lieu of ice. Let's discuss the first suggestion. Richard James Salts pointed out that Urban Renewal was probably too expensive to use and recommended Scorched Earth and Punitive Counterstrike instead. The tagging option of choice is Trojan Horse, since we can be pretty sure that the Runner won't take long finding an agenda. Again, Accounts Receivable must be the bit-gainer workhorse, as there is no ice whatsoever to protect any nodes. Such a deck might look like this:

Golden Loop (Tag'n'Bag variant)

- **6 Genetics-Visionary Acquisition**
- **6 Executive Extraction**
- **6 Artificial Security Directors**
- **6 Systematic Layoffs**
- **9 Accounts Receivable**
- **4 Trojan Horse**
- **4 Scorched Earth**
- **4 Punitive Counterstrike**

Flatlining won't be possible before Trojan/Scorched/Punitive (or just Trojan/Scorched if the Runner is foolhardy) are lined up in HQ, which propably won't happen before the midgame. The emphasis lies still on scoring the first agenda as early as possible. If the emphasis were to shift over to winning by flatlining, the number of Systematic Layoffs could be reduced to include more of the tag'n'bag cards. In any case, this strategy tries to either flatline Runners or otherwise scare them so that they don't run that frequently and lose the AP race. The Runner will of course access and see some tag'n'bag cards early on and quickly realize what the Corp is up to. It is more than likely that this tag'n'bag variant will lose terribly against any sensible Runner who plays with hand-size increasers like Militech MRAM Chip and/or with meat-damage prevention like Emergency Self-Construct. Since most tournament Runners pack exactly these kinds of cards, Tag'n'Bag Golden Loop is recommended only for non-competitive play.

Another possible variant is the one with Net-damage nodes. Here, the idea is likewise to either flatline the Runner or to slow him or her down enough for the Corp to race to victory. While Richard James Salts mentioned TRAP! as his favorite node, I think that Setup! is definitely the better choice here. The Corp can't really make use of TRAP!'s tag without losing focus in its card choice, and the little money it has had better be spent for advancing agendas. So here is my suggestion:

Golden Loop (Net-damage variant)

- **6 Genetics-Visionary Acquisition**
- **6 Executive Extraction**
- **6 Artificial Security Directors**
- **7 Systematic Layoffs**
- **7 Accounts Receivable**
- **13 Setup!**

This might actually be deadly for a Runner who is first spurred on by an early agenda and then hits a bunch of Setup!s with a multi-access attack. Still, the question is whether a little bit of Net damage and the card drawing it forces will slow the Runner down more than some solid ice. The best thing that can be said about this variant is that it seriously discourages multi-access like Rush Hour or R&D Mole. Golden Loop can easily afford (and must expect) giving away a couple of agendas to the Runner, but what it fears most is a Runner digging deep into R&D and snatching away everything that is coming up.

In the end, I come to the conclusion that flatlining isn't really what Golden Loop should be doing, as that can be had with much sleeker approaches which don't have 18 agendas taking up most of the deck space. So the original version with some ice strewn in is perhaps the one that follows the idea behind the deck most closely. The ice selection can be tweaked of course; the most powerful addition from **Netrunner** *Classic* was Glacier, which in my eyes is the only chance of making Golden Loop playable. The other ice is a matter of preference; Mazer is cheaper than Haunting Inquisition, and perhaps Quandary does the job of stopping the ubiquitous Skeleton Passkeys just as well for fewer bits.

Puzzle is a nice piece of ice to put in front of the first agenda for scoring it "by hand", as rezzing Puzzle and three advancement counters can be paid for with just 5 bits. This could even do away with the need for Systematic Layoffs:

Golden Loop Deck (Slow-advance variant)

6	**Genetics-Visionary Acquisition**
6	**Executive Extraction**
6	**Artificial Security Directors**
10	**Accounts Receivable**
8	**Puzzle**
3	**Glacier**
3	**Banpei**
3	**Data Naga**

While cheaper, this approach is a huge gamble: The Corp is depending on the Runner neither having an Inside Job nor the combination of a fast bit influx with a matching breaker in hand at start. Still, installing Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker and breaching Puzzle costs a stiff 12 bits; with Raffles, it's 11 bits, Rent-I-Con and Cyfermaster, 8, Codecracker, 7, and Skeleton Passkeys, 6. Once more, we see why Passkeys is so popular. The good thing about the gamble is, by the way, that giving away one meagre agenda point isn't much of a loss. Perhaps the Corp should include 3 Systematic Layoffs as a backup plan, replacing the Data Nagas.

There is still some experimenting to be done with Golden Loop, and when you are playing some casual games, I do encourage you to try out this flashy strategy. It is certainly fun to play, and perhaps you can use proxies if you don't have enough copies of the agenda cards. I'm sure that some adjusting can be done to optimize the decks, for example with cards like Corporate Guard Temps, Efficiency Experts, or just about any kind of ice. So, go ahead and loop the Loop!

Highlander Strategy

by Jens Kreutzer
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The "Highlander" format is an overlooked, but rather interesting variant for Constructed tournaments, the concept of which can be summed up in one sentence quoted from the movie *Highlander*: "There can only be one!" (namely, only one copy of each card is allowed in a deck). On first glance, this lets Highlander appear to be some kind of glorified Sealed Deck format, because only seldom will you pull several copies of the same card in Sealed. But I think that it is not that easy. In the 2004 German **Netrunner** Nationals, we tried this Highlander format. The idea was that players who usually are reluctant to enter Constructed tournaments because of their small card collections would be attracted by this "leveling" environment: They can compete with the grossest "card lords" on equal footing if they have just *one* complete set of **Netrunner**. In the end, only six players participated (and the usual suspects to boot), but we liked the format a lot.

Since for Highlander, there is no strategy discussion of note to be found anywhere, I'd like to put together some thoughts of my own. These are based on my limited experience from the German Nationals. I have the decklists of all the participants as data to base my evaluation on. To print all twelve lists here would be a bit boring, but if anybody is interested in them, just email me and I will send you the file.

Well, to my mind, there are several questions that pose themselves right away.

1.) Is there a "perfect" Highlander deck? We should definitely take a closer look at the two decks that won the tournament. But we should also look at statistics: Cards that are deemed especially good for the format will show up in almost every deck.
2.) Do you play the same cards that you would consider good in a Sealed tournament? Here, statistics will help as well.
3.) Is it possible to play distinct archetypes in Highlander, like Tag'n'Bag, Net damage, fast advancement etc.? If so, which one is strongest?

Let's start with a "hit list" of the best-liked cards.

CORPORATION

AGENDAS

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Corporate War	6
2	Tycho Extension	5
3	Employee Empowerment	4
3	Unlisted Research Lab	4
4	Corporate Downsizing	3
4	Data Fort Remapping	3
4	Main-Office Relocation	3
5	Corporate Retreat	2
5	Marine Arcology	2
5	On-Call Solo Team	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): AI Chief Financial Officer, Executive Extraction, Fetal AI, Marked Accounts, Security Purge, Theorem Proof.

There are 31 agendas in the game of **Netrunner** that weren't used by any player at all. The hit list isn't very surprising and reminds me of Sealed-deck play. Rare cards play only a marginal role here, as do specific themes such as Tag'n'Bag. Cheap and sleek, Corp War and Tycho Extension ruled the day.

NODES

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	BBS Whispering Campaign	6
1	Rockerboy Promotion	6
2	Braindance Campaign	5
3	Chicago Branch	4
3	Department of Truth Enhancement	4
3	Holovid Campaign	4
3	South African Mining Corp	4
4	Vapor Ops	3
5	ACME Savings & Loan	2
5	Information Laundering	2
5	Pacifica Regional AI	2
5	Schlaghund	2
5	Setup!	2
5	Spinn Public Relations	2
5	TRAP!	2
5	Vacant Soulkiller	2
5	Virus Test Site	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): Bel-Digmo Antibody, City Surveillance, Investment Firm, Siren, Strategic Planning Group.

Only the tournament winner, Fabian, didn't play Braindance Campaign, and everybody played BBS Whispering Campaign and Rockerboy Promotion. The money nodes are clearly on top here, unsurprisingly. Advancement helpers come second, followed by

some few damage cards. Conspicuously absent are Sealed-deck favorite Government Contract, Blood Cat, and Corporate Negotiating Center.

UPGRADES

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Bizarre Encryption Scheme	3
2	Networked Center	1
2	Rio de Janeiro City Grid	1
2	Roving Submarine	1
2	Sterdroid	1

Upgrades, it turns out, were hardly used at all.

OPERATIONS

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Accounts Receivables	6
1	Project Consultants	6
1	Systematic Layoffs	6
2	Efficiency Experts	5
2	Management Shake-Up	5
3	Credit Consolidation	4
3	Off-site Backups	4
3	Overtime Incentives	4
4	Night Shift	3
4	Urban Renewal	3
5	Falsified-Transactions Expert	2
5	Manhunt	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): Chance Observation, Corporate Guard Temps, Day Shift, Edgerunner, Inc., Temps, Punitive Counterstrike, Scorched Earth, Trojan Horse.

Few surprises here, but half of the players didn't want to miss out on the chance a well-timed Urban Renewal offers them.

ICE

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Quandary	5
2	Fire Wall	4
2	Keeper	4
2	Mazer	4
2	Nerve Labyrinth	4
3	Banpei	3
3	Bolter Cluster	3
3	Cerberus	3
3	Crystal Wall	3
3	Data Naga	3
3	Data Wall	3
3	Data Wall 2.0	3
3	Glacier	3
3	Haunting Inquisition	3
3	Neural Blade	3
3	Rock Is Strong	3
3	Wall of Static	3

Ice choice was much more variegated; ranks 4-5 are not shown. That code gates and walls lead the field is perhaps explained by the smaller number that is available in comparison with sentries. Glacier and Haunting Inquisition really deserve a higher rank, I think. Nerve Labyrinth is a bit of a surprise. All in all, this list looks similar to Sealed choice as well: Neural Blade, Banpei and Bolter Cluster just give a good run for the money. Quandary as the anti-Skeleton-Passkeys-ice leads the field: Very likely a metagame choice. This brings us to the Runner.

RUNNER

PROGRAMS: ICEBREAKERS

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Cyfermaster	4
1	Skeleton Passkeys	4
2	Pile Driver	3
2	Redecorator	3
2	Rent-I-Con	3
3	Big Frackin' Gun	2
3	Codecracker	2
3	Corrosion	2
3	Dwarf	2
3	Early Worm	2
3	Loony Goon	2
3	Matador	2
3	Shaka	2
3	Wrecking Ball	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): AI Boon, Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker, Hammer, Jackhammer, Psychic Friend, Ramming Piston, Raptor, Wizard's Book.

It seems that the metagame choice for Quandary was justified, with Passkeys right at the top. Also at the top is the *anti*-card for Quandary, Keeper and Mazer, though: Cyfermaster. Pile Driver was a no-brainer, but Redecorator sure has become a shooting star. Rent-I-Con was the breaker of choice for half of the players, and I can tell you: It works, even in Highlander. Fabian played *both* Rent-I-Con and Bartmoss/Joan in his winning stack!

PROGRAMS: NON-ICEBREAKERS

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Newsgroup Filter	6
2	Zetatech Software Installer	4
3	Imp	3
3	Shredder Uplink Protocol	3
4	Afreet	2
4	Clown	2
4	Emergency Self-Construct	2
4	Self-Modifying Code	2
4	Succubus	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): Enterprise, Inc., Shields, Joan of Arc, Microtech AI Interface, Mouse, R&D Protocol Files, Skullcap, Startup Immolator, Superglue, Taxman, Vienna 22.

I would have considered Emergency Self-Construct a must-include, but only two players did run it. With Filter and ZSI, bit-gainers lead the field. Very few virus cards—because you cannot run then in multiples, perhaps they are not worth it, like in Sealed.

HARDWARE

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Zetatech Mem Chip	5
2	Militech MRAM Chip	4
2	Vintage Camaro	4
3	WuTech Mem Chip	3
4	Microtech Backup Drive	2
4	MRAM Chip	2
4	Nasuko Cycle	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): Bodyweight Data Crèche, Little Black Box, R&D Interface, Tycho Mem Chip.

No Zetatech Portastation, no The Deck? Mainly memory and hand-size increasers take up the list. The Backup Drive is for Rent-I-Con, of course. People relied on tag prevention rather than on Emergency Self-Construct, it seems.

RESOURCES

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	The Short Circuit	6
2	Broker	5
2	Junkyard BBS	5
3	The Shell Traders	4
3	Short-term Contract	4
4	Expendable Family Member	3
4	Fall Guy	3
4	Mercenary Subcontract	3
4	R&D Mole	3
4	Rigged Investments	3
4	Streetware Distributor	3
4	Technician Lover	3
5	Back Door to Hilliard	2
5	Crash Everett, Inventive Fixer	2
5	Executive File Clerk	2
5	Liberated Savings Account	2
5	Loan from Chiba	2
5	Wired Switchboard	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): Access to Arasaka, Airport Locker, Aujourd'Oui, Back Door to Netwatch, Corporate Ally, Credit Subversion, Danshi's Second ID, Databroker, Death from Above, HQ Mole, N.E.T.O., Sandbox Dig, Swiss Bank Account, Top Runners' Conference, Umbrella Policy.

Fabian was the only one who *didn't* use Broker. Is he crazy, or is Broker overrated? In a format where your favorite cards only feature in one copy, Short Circuit and Junkyard are good ideas obviously. It is interesting to see that so many players liked Shell Traders (while nobody played Precision Bribery).

PREPS

rank	name	used by x players (of 6)
1	Bodyweight Synthetic Blood	6
1	Jack'n'Joe	6
1	Score!	6
2	Custodial Position	5
2	Inside Job	5
2	Networking	5
2	Rush Hour	5
2	Temple Microcode Outlet	5
3	All-hands	4
3	Cruising for Netwatch	4
3	Executive Wiretaps	4
3	Lucidrine Booster Drug	4
3	Mantis, Fixer-at-Large	4
3	Panzer Run	4
4	Gideon's Pawnshop	3
4	If You Want It Done Right…	3
4	Livewire's Contacts	3
4	Sneak Preview	3
5	Arasaka Owns You	2
5	Core Command: Jettison Ice	2
5	Library Search	2
5	MIT West Tier	2
5	Priority Wreck	2
5	Security Code WORM Chip	2
5	Social Engineering	2
5	Stakeout	2

Honorary mention (used by one player each): Blackmail, Booster-gang Connections, Do the 'Drine, Edited Shipping Manifests, Forgotten Backup Chip, Hunt Club BBS, misc.for-sale, On the Fast Track, Organ Donor, The Personal Touch, Playful AI, Synchronized Attack on HQ, Terrorist Reprisal, Valu-Pak Software Bundle, Weefle Initiation.

No big surprises with the preps: Bodyweight, Jack'n'Joe and Score! remain all-time favorites. So far, the statistics seem to suggest that Highlander is indeed very close to Sealed Deck. But let's now have a look at what the individual decks tried to accomplish.

rank	Corp
1	Fast-advancement with meat and Net damage.
2	Fast-advancement with Rio City Grid and Roving Sub.
3	Fast-advancement with Gray Ops, Sleepy Ice.
4	Fast-advancement with Networked Center.
5	Fast-advancement with "trap" cards and tagging/Urban.
6	Tag'n'Bag with fast-advancement and ambush nodes.

While fast-advancement was a given, each player tried to add *some* gimmick or surprise to it. A good mix seems to be a good idea: The winning deck included three avenues to victory (fast-advancement, Tag'n'Bag, Net damage). Sadly, the deck that included the most Tag'n'Bag cards also finished in last place.

rank	Runner
1	Rent-I-Con + Bartmoss MI, ice destruction, Taxman.
2	Rent-I-Con + breaker suite, HQ/R&D attack, ice destruction.
3	AI Boon, multi-access, Tech Lover, Corporate Ally.
4	Rent-I-Con + breaker suite, HQ/R&D control, multi-access.
5	Multi-access, Terrorist Reprisal, Vienna 22.
6	Multi-access.

Unlike in Sealed games, HQ attack and ice destruction seem to be feasible in Highlander. The audacity to play both Rent-I-Con and Bartmoss paid off for Fabian, but bodes ill for breaker variety. Strangely enough: The winning stack had no multi-access whatsoever! This is a clear departure from Sealed deck. In fact, the stack that most closely resembled a Sealed deck finished in last place.

To conclude: The Corp decks do look rather similar and are close to Sealed deck, but they always come with a fascinating twist. The Runner stacks suffer from Rent-I-Con monoculture, but represent a clear departure from Sealed deck, which in my eyes is quite a surprise. Hopefully, this article has given you an impression of what you can expect in a Highlander tournament and whetted your appetite for giving it a try.

Rabbit, Krumz and the Tracing Game

by Jens Kreutzer
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Rabbit & Krumz

Go ahead and ask a random **Netrunner** player about the cards he or she considers to be the weakest in the game, and you have a good chance of hearing something not entirely dissimilar to the header of this article (though Corruption from *Classic* or Arasaka Portable Prototype are candidates as well). But why is this? Why is nobody playing with Rabbit and Krumz? In multiples

and in combination with a cheap base link like Back Door to Hilliard, Rabbit can thwart all trace ice, and Krumz is a bit resource that rezzes for free and remains active throughout the game (face it, no Runners in their right minds will ever pay anything to trash it). And inexhaustible bit providers are usually a good thing, aren't they? So, why are these two cards *that* bad?

Well, one reason is obviously that they don't deliver much bang for the buck: What if Rabbit reduced the trace limit by 2 or 3, or if Krumz provided 4 or 5 bits for tracing each turn? That sounds a bit more reasonable, and you would perhaps not dismiss them right out of hand. But would you really want to play them? I suspect that even that would not be enough to make them attractive to players, and there is a deeper reason for that: the status of the so-called "tracing game" in the **Netrunner** play environment. It is rather obvious that the good people who designed **Netrunner** grossly overestimated the role of actual tracing in your average **Netrunner** game. If it happens once or twice during the entire game without both trace value and link value being zero, that's a lot already. But if you cannot depend on Rabbit and Krumz being actually relevant, let alone decisive during a game, you will be reluctant to include them in your deck.

The Tracing Game

I'd like to use this article to take a closer look at the situations where a meaningful tracing game *could* happen, and what makes players decide to actually let it happen or not. With "meaningful", I mean a tracing game whose result isn't predetermined, i. e., one in which both Corp or Runner could be the winner, depending on how many bits are spent by each of the two, and both players knowing this.

If the Runner doesn't have a means of increasing link value, either because no base link (or cards like The Springboard) are installed or because bits are lacking, he usually won't let a trace happen that he knows will be lost—i. e., she might accidentally run into tracer ice that was rezzed into her face, but not run willingly into known tracer ice without being able to break it. The only situations in which this might be a good idea are if the Runner wants to hand out Bad Publicity with Back Door to Netwatch or wants to bluff the Corp into spending bits by making it believe that a hidden resource is Wired Switchboard, which it, however, isn't.

On the other hand, if the Runner knows for sure that a trace won't be successful because the Corp is low on bits or the Runner has Access through Alpha, it's clear that she'll let the trace happen if that means that she can save bits because breaking the subroutine would be more expensive. But that is a no-brainer.

The Corp usually doesn't have the choice when it comes to tracer ice, only when deciding whether to rez it or not. Obviously, if the Runner has The Deck installed, a wise Corp won't bother with rezzing Fang. It does have a choice when it comes to tracers like Chance Observation or Blood Cat. While Blood Cat will frequently trace away until the Runner is brought to justice, the Corp will usually only play Chance Observation if it is a sure thing, Wired Switchboard notwithstanding. Note that the question of tag prevention is a completely different issue.

Meaningful Tracing Games

So let's turn to the interesting situations now: the "meaningful" tracing games I mentioned earlier. To give an example, let's assume the Corp has a rezzed Fang in front of R&D, and the Runner has Access to Kiribati and the bits to use it, but no sentry breaker. R&D is always a juicy target, so what should the Runner do? It's clear that for five bits, the Runner could be sure to exceed Fang's trace limit. But if the Corp doesn't spend four bits, the Runner could get away with paying less. The question is whether the risk is worth it. Most Corps would probably assume that the Runner pays five (because the cost of getting hit by Fang would negate the saved bits), and just spend zero. But if the Runner can assume that the Corp will spend zero bits, spending just one bit on Kiribati becomes a tempting proposition. But then, the Corp might consider spending one bit to "keep the Runner honest".

For the Runner, there are three things to be gained by running R&D in this case: 1.) Evading Fang's trace and thereby accessing R&D, 2.) the prospect of getting away with spending fewer bits than five, 3.) making the Corp waste bits. To my mind, it seem that 1.) and 2.) don't go together well because of the risk. The Runner wants 1.), namely to breach R&D—if that can be accomplished on the cheap, fine, but a Runner can't afford wasting actions and bits for nothing. It follows that 2.) must take second place here. 3.), on the other hand, can be accomplished even if the Runner spends five bits and makes sure that 1.) is accomplished. It's just a matter of the Corp of "wanting to keep the Runner honest". A situation in which saving bits is really crucial for the outcome of the game won't come up very often (perhaps in that final desperate run to get at the winning agenda), and if it does, it is probably obvious for the Corp as well, who will then gladly spend as many bits as possible to thwart that all-important run.

What I'm trying to say is that usually, it is just not in the Runner's interest to gamble on the tracing game, as a precious run (perhaps bits have already been spent on breaking other ice, and most surely an action) and avoiding adverse effects are at stake. But if there is no gamble, it is no real tracing "game" at all, just another way of "breaking" tracer subroutines. Admittedly, having a useful base link like The Deck or Back Door to Hilliard lying around is rather nice because you never know when it could gain you a free lunch or save you from an Urban Renewal. But let's face it, if you're trying to deal with tracer subroutines, it is safer, often cheaper, and most of all more focused to just use a sentry breaker, which you need for non-tracer sentries anyway. Rabbits would only get between the feet of Shaka.

Of course, strategy rules are there to be broken, especially in **Netrunner**, and I think that a master Runner will occasionally do play a "meaningful tracing game", most often in Sealed play. But a master Runner probably won't ever base a Constructed deck on it. Lots of Rabbits and a cheap base link *would* negate tracer ice, but the Corp would adapt and just not install or rez any more of them. Tracer ice is just too narrow an aspect of the game to invest so much in negating it. Decks with bits for increasing link value like Techtronica Utility Suit are likewise too narrow: Why not use stealth bits instead, or Speed Chips, which can be used to break any sentry subroutine, not just tracers? And even stealth bits are too narrow (and expensive) to have a big impact on the tournament scene (though *Silent Impact* might have changed that). If nobody plays with Replicator, then nobody will play with Rabbit, either.

If Corps started to use tracer ice exclusively, the metagame could shift towards Rabbit and Replicator. After all, such ice usually *is* cheaper than other sentries with the same strength and comparable subroutines, so it does have an appeal. But because the Corp has to expect cards like The Deck or Access through Alpha, it won't happen anytime soon. Even Paris City Grid

is powerless against Alpha. Hacker Tracker Central could help out, but there isn't enough tracing happening for it to be effective.

I think it is a pity that the tracing game is such a stepchild of **Netrunner** gameplay. Playing mind games with each other and bluffing are aspects that make **Netrunner** such an interesting and multifaceted TCG, and we could use more of that. Something akin to Neal's Draconian Banned List could perhaps make more tracing games happen. To that end, I think that cards like The Deck or Access through Alpha should be on the list, because they make it too cheap to exceed the trace limit: They prevent "meaningful" tracing games from ever happening. As it stands now, Neal's list includes Access through Alpha, but not The Deck, and, critically, it also bans Access to Arasaka and Access to Kiribati, which is not helpful for the encouragement of tracing. Perhaps this is a good time to start thinking about changing the list, as was originally intended by Neal. Another, more drastic idea would be a format that banned all non-tracer sentry ice. Would you play with Rabbit and Krumz then? An interesting question.

Did You Know?

Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection

#19: Trauma Team™

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with support by David Pecon and Eric Platel

Trauma Team is one of those cards that never see a lot of play. After all, a resource that prevents meat damage doesn't make much sense: Usually, when a Runner takes meat damage, he or she has been tagged. Therefore, the Corp can just trash Trauma Team and *then* deal the meat damage. While this costs the Corp an action and two bits and provides an additional barrier of some kind, it seems that Trauma Team won't ever get to do much actual preventing. That is a pity, because the card has a really cool flavor. Taken from **R. Talsorian's** *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.* roleplaying game, Trauma Team Inc. is essential for the continued survival of the average group of Cyberpunks. Let's look at the *Cyberpunk* rulebook, second edition, page 119-20:

"One of the most powerful Corporations of the Cyber Age is the Trauma Team™; a bonded and licensed paramedical franchise operating throughout the U.S., Canada and parts of Europe. These crack ambulance units are specifically designed to get to the scene of a fatality within seven minutes (or your money back).

"Trauma Team's crews are made up of the best paramedical techs and staff available. The teams are usually made up of a driver, a senior Medtechie, an assistant and two security officers. They normally travel in a heavily armored AV-4 aircraft, supported by mobile tanker trucks and ground refuelling stations. A Trauma Team AV-4 contains the most sophisticated revivification and life support technology available, including a mobile cryotank to lower the body temperature to approximately 24 degrees F (the optimum temperature to prevent hemorrhaging, shock, and brain swelling).

"Trauma Teams™ can be summoned by dialing 911 on any phone, and are equipped to trace the origin of any phone call to its source. (You're billed from the moment you call, until delivery to the hospital.) You may also opt to carry a deadman transmitter, which will activate and automatically signal a Trauma Team the moment your brainwave pattern falls into a coma state. The most common transmitter is in the form of a plastic card, which is activated by bending the card in half, and has a range of 20 miles. Trauma cards can be transferred between members of a group as long as the card owner is present to to sign the charges off when the team arrives.

"There are usually a dozen or more Trauma Teams on call at any time in a major city. Immediately after receiving an alert, the nearest Trauma Team™ unit goes airborne, their sophisticated tracking equipment homing in on the last known location of the patient. The pilot (who is skilled enough to set his six-ton AV-4 on top of a parked car if need be) drops in as close as possible. If the firefight is still going on, the security team secures the area (using the AV's twin autocannon or their own portable weapons). The medtechs load the patient on board, shunting his life support on to the onboard heart-lung machines, plugging him into onboard biomonitors, and chilling his body down in the refrigerated tank for stabilization. Rapid surgery is performed on the spot for the most critical wounds, while the med specialist uses a combination of electroshock, drugs and manual resuscitation to get the patient on-line again. The pilot slams down the throttles, and the AV-4 rockets skywards on a pillar of exhaust, headed for the nearest emergency room. The entire process may have taken all of four minutes from start to finish.

"As a privately-owned concern, Trauma Teams™ are not under any obligation to transport a casualty to a hospital, although they are responsible for reviving and stabilizing critically wounded patients. Trauma Team fees are exceedingly steep ($100 per minute), the best method of offsetting their exorbitant costs is to either carry Trauma Team services as part of a Corporate group insurance policy, or to establish an account with TT International, paying a premium of $500 in advance each month for continued service."

In the card illustration by Mike Kimble, we can see a Trauma Team™ AV-4 in flight, swooping past two structures that bear the trefoil logo of Arasaka Corp, autocannons blazing. The French version of the card has a flavor text: *"C'est pas la balle où il y a marqué mon nom qui m'inquiète, c'est la balle où il y a marqué 'pour qui de droit'." —Resident anonyme de Belfast.* This translates to: *"It's not the bullet with my name on it that worries me, it's the bullet that says 'for anyone appropriate'." —An anonymous resident of Belfast.*